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United for Quality Care

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Before the Labor Committee

In Support of SB 938 An Act Concerning Unemployment Benefits for Striking Workers

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Phyllis Frazier, I live in Willimantic, and work as a Direct Support Staff (DSS) at Sunrise Northeast. I've been working in this field for over 20 years. I come before you today to urge you to pass SB 938 so that striking workers in Connecticut can have access to unemployment benefits.

I love the work that I do, especially because I love helping and advocating for people that can't do it for themselves. I love that I get to provide them with the ability to live at home in their community and function as a whole person. I love to help empower them, especially when most of the world tries to limit them. We focus on their abilities, and not their disabilities. Like you or I, when people are given dignity, respect and a sense of belonging to a community it enhances their life.

What frustrates me is we are not respected by management for the work that we do. I was one of the striking Sunrise workers last Fall. We were angry that we had to do something as drastic as going on strike just to earn the wages and benefits necessary to meet our basic needs as human beings and to take care of our families.

Looking back I am proud of what we achieved but it was incredibly hard for us to do as workers. We were afraid of how the strike would impact us financially. Would we still be able to pay our bills? Would we still be able to feed and clothe our children? How long would the strike go and what would be the outcome? The uncertainty was overwhelming and we were all incredibly stressed out. I am raising my grandson so for me my biggest concern was ensuring I could continue to provide for him.

If my coworkers and I had access to unemployment benefits we would have been able to fight the good fight without fear that we wouldn't be able to support our

families. We would have had financial stability, and confidence that we could survive through the struggle of the strike.

Workers don't go on strike because we want to, we go on strike because we need to. We do it because we've asked management for change, and our pleas have gone unanswered. We do it because our clients deserve the best care possible and we as caregivers deserve to live lives of dignity and respect.

By passing SB 938, you all will be standing with workers and securing their right to strike. It is the right and moral thing to do, and it is what the workers of Connecticut deserve. Thank you.